Jim Henson's™
THE STORYTELLER™
Tale Three of Four
Dragons
ARCHAIA
HANNAH CHRISTENSON

LBINA

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KRAKOOM
NOTHING GOOD COMES OF STORMS. ONLY WET AND NOISE.
RUMBLE
A LOT OF WET AND NOISE, TO BE SURE, BUT THE SOUNDS OF ROLLING AND CLANGING THUNDER BRINGS TO MIND IMAGES OF GREAT BATTLES FOUGHT LONG AGO.
RUMBLE
RUMB
SPEARS CRASHING AGAINST SHIELDS, AXES SPLITTING ARMOR, SWORD MEETING SWORD ON THE BATTLEFIELD.
BUT I KNOW ANOTHER STORY THIS STORM REMINDS ME OF.

IN ANOTHER TIME, THERE WAS A POWERFUL WARRIOR BORN TO A SOUND OF THUNDER SO GREAT, IT COULD SHAKE THIS HOUSE TO THE GROUND.
SOME HAVE SAID THAT SHE WAS BORN IN A VALLEY AS THUNDERBOLT STRICKEN MOUNTAINS CRUMBLED AROUND HER. OTHERS SWEAR SHE WAS BORN IN HER FATHER'S CATHEDRAL, SAFE FROM A SQUALL SO TERRIBLE THAT ONLY THE CATHEDRAL STOOD AMONGST THE RUBBLE THE NEXT MORNING.
She was taller and stronger than other children her age. She never quite found her equal, and was never quite satisfied when she won the games children play.
She was swifter and more cunning than her peers, and she sought after those things that require such abilities.
She could not resist the call to arms, and soon became a frightening sight on the field of battle.
Regardless of how she was born, Albina Popovich was a different child all together.

After one such battle, she returned home to her mother and her father, priests who lived in a holy house of worship.
Albina Popovich told her mother and father about the many battles she had faced...
...of men and demons she had conquered...
...and the lands she had seen.
She was indeed thrilled to be home again.
She rested for a time.
But Albina soon began to long for the weight of a sword in her hand and the sound of thundering hooves across the field.

MOTHER AND FATHER, I COME FOR YOUR BLESSING. I WISH TO SEEK OUT A LORD TO GIVE MY SERVICE TO. I CAN HARDLY STAND THE SILENCE IN MY EARS SINCE MY RETURN, I CAN'T BEAR HOW LIGHT I FEEL WITHOUT MY ARMOR, AND I CAN NO LONGER ABIDE THIS STILLNESS.
I MUST LEAVE AT ONCE.
I SEE YOU ARE DESPERATE TO RIDE OUT AGAIN AND I SEE THAT NO MAN OR BEAST CAN BAR YOUR WAY. GO SAFELY, DAUGHTER, AND COME HOME AGAIN.
WHEN WILL YOU RETURN TO ME? SHALL I SEE YOUR FACE AGAIN IN THIS LIFE? WHO WILL GUARD YOU AND CARRY YOUR BURDENS? DAUGHTER OF MINE, IF YOU MUST GO AND FACE MAN AND DEMON ALIKE ONCE MORE, THEN FOR MY SAKE, DO NOT GO INTO BATTLE ALONE.
IN THIS TEMPLE THERE IS THE DAUGHTER OF ONE WE TRUST. TAKE MARA PARANOV ALONG WITH YOU, SO THAT YOU MAY NEVER FACE YOUR FOES ALONE.
MOTHER, I AM ABLE TO CARRY MY BURDENS WITHOUT SOMEONE TO CUMBER ME.
NOT ALL BURDENS CAN BE CARRIED ON SHOULDERS, ALBINA.
THE HEAVIEST WEIGHT IS OFTEN UNSEEN.
MARA! PLEASE COME AND MEET MY DAUGHTER.
And there Albina met Mara, as dust motes drifted through the light of a church window.

FAREWELL, MOTHER AND FATHER.
BE SURE TO COMB HIS MANE AND POLISH HIS BUCKLES, THERE ISN'T MUCH ELSE YOU COULD DO TO HELP.
I WASN'T CHARGED WITH POLISHING TACK.
LET'S BE OFF.
Albina and Mara mounted their good steeds in the light of the next morning, and with boldness in one heart and resolution in the other, they set on their way.

VERY WELL.
THEN YOU MAY CARRY THIS.
They traveled a great distance in search of someone to offer their services to.
They knew of a prince far away in Kiev, whose greatness and benevolence stretched as far as one cared to go.

The bogatyr, a fierce knight, and her servant braved the wilderness to reach his lands.
WHO ARE YOU? WHAT BUSINESS HAVE YOU WITH PRINCE VLADIMIR?
I AM ALBINA POPOVICH, DAUGHTER OF THE OLD PRIEST OF THE CATHEDRAL. I OFFER MY SERVICE TO A NEW LORD, AS DOES MY SERVANT, MARA PARANOV.
YOU ARE *THE* ALBINA POPOVICH, THE ONE WHO RIDES AT THE FRONT AND IS FIRST INTO THE FRAY? YOU ARE AS TALL AS THEY SAY! I WILL SEND WORD TO PRINCE VLADIMIR IMMEDIATELY.

The guard sent word and soon, Albina and her servant were welcomed to a feast with the prince.
Neither the bogatyr nor her servant had ever seen a palace equal to the one they stood in now. Albina had never laid eyes on such delicately carved stone. The grandest house she had ever seen had been her father's wooden cathedral.
They reached the feast hall where they met Prince Vladimir and his wife. The prince greeted her and her servant, and asked from where she came. And Albina said again--
I AM ALBINA POPOVICH, DAUGHTER OF THE OLD PRIEST OF THE CATHEDRAL.
I OFFER MY SERVICE TO YOU, PRINCE VLADIMIR OF KIEV, AS DOES MY SERVANT MARA PARANOV.

Prince Vladimir and his wife welcomed them, as word of Albina's deeds had reached their ears. The prince accepted her offer.
The prince provided Albina a place of honor and pride at his table, but--
--Albina chose to sit near the stove, the lowliest seat in the hall.
WHY DO YOU SIT IN--
TUGARIN! I SEE HIM-- TUGARIN!
A great shadow fell over the city.
Screams announced the Terrible One, the Son of the Worm.
The dragon Tugarin.

CRACK!
Tugarin the dragon burst through the doors and filled the entire hall with his tail swinging, his three heads hissing, and his wings stretching to the rafters above.
But despite his snarls and spitting, Albina Popovich remained seated by the stove.

Tugarin's three heads snarled and bit the air.
KAKkkkssss
They squished painfully into one.
KAK!
KAK!
His clawed toes curled and uncurled, and his skin shed.
Standing before them now was a man where a beast once was.
Tugarin began to feast from the table at which he was most unwelcome.
He acted in a nasty manner, casting insults at the prince and his wife as quickly and easily as he cast gnawed bones or a fish pie he took a disliking to.
The Son of the Worm boasted of his power and greatness while he swept through the room.
His words hung in the air like smoke.

MY FATHER HAD A COW--
WHO SAID--?
--A GREAT UGLY BEAST, WHO GOT INTO THE GRAIN.
KAK!
KAK
SHE ATE AND ATE, I IMAGINE SHE WAS IN HEAVEN! SHE TOOK WHAT SHE LIKED AND ATE HERSELF TO DEATH! AND SO SHALL YOU EAT YOURSELF TO DEATH AT THIS TABLE, TUGARIN, YOU PUSTULOUS NEWT!
HE WAS INDEED BECOMING RATHER BOIL-LIKE AS HIS SKIN SEEMED TO GROW AND STRETCH, BUBBLING OVER RAPIDLY GROWING BONES AS HE TRANSFORMED BACK INTO HIS TRUE SELF.
But Albina was prepared.
KAK!
SSSSSSSSS

TOK!
THANK YOU FOR YOUR GIFT, TUGARIN! IT IS AS FINE AS A STEEL KNIFE!
WITH THIS STEEL KNIFE I WILL CUT OPEN YOUR BREAST AND SEE YOUR FIERY HEART!

GIVE ME HIS STEEL KNIFE! I'LL USE IT MYSELF TO CUT HIS BREAST AND SEE HIS FIERY HEART!
STAY!
HA! TUGARIN, YOU STINKING WORM! MY SERVANT WILL NOT SPARE YOU, GET YOURSELF INTO THE AIR OR SHE'LL HAVE YOU!
Tugarin was outraged at the boldness and blindness of Albina Popovich.
He inhaled deeply--
--filling his chest with a hateful fire.
KAK!
KAK!!
SKREEE!!

Tugarin clutched his ruined face...

...and took flight as quickly as he had arrived, vowing that they would meet again.

HE'S GONE! I WOULD HAVE HAD HIM IF I'D HAD HIS SPIKE. GIVE IT TO ME AND WHEN NEXT I SEE HIM, HE WILL NOT FLY AGAIN!
NO, I'LL KEEP IT AT MY SIDE. I'LL BE THE ONE HE COMES FOR.
The next day, Mara awoke early to feed and water the horses.
LITTLE SERVANT.
COME OUT! I KNOW YOUR VOICE, TUGARIN!
DO NOT SPEAK TO ME.
TELL THAT CORPULENT WOMAN TO COME TO THE OPEN FIELD TOMORROW IF SHE IS SO EAGER TO CLEAN MY TEETH WITH HER BONES.
I'LL FIGHT YOU MYSELF, WORM. YOU WILL BE THE SUPPER OF RAVENS AND RATS IN THE STREET!
ONE WHO BUCKLES THE BOOTSTRAPS AND ADJUSTS THE TASSELS HANGING FROM A PORCINE BOGATYR IS IN NO PLACE TO CHALLENGE ME.

I COULD HAVE HAD HIM RIGHT THEN IF I'D HAD HIS STEEL KNIFE AND NOW HOW WILL WE KILL HIM? HE'S FLYING THROUGH THE AIR, HOW CAN WE TOUCH HIM NOW?!
The bogatyr's servant was angry at her missed chance, but Albina remained bold enough to smile at the servant's scowl.
TUGARIN WILL MEET ME IN THE FIELD, BUT I WILL NOT BE ALONE.
YOU TAUNTED HIM, AND HE RESPONDED TO YOU. YOU ARE NOT AS STRONG AS I, BUT YOU ARE QUICK AND YOUR WORDS FIND PURCHASE.
COME WITH ME AND WE WILL BADGER AND BEAT HIM TOGETHER!
WELL, I HAVEN'T GOT A CHOICE ANYWAY. IF YOU GO INTO BATTLE ALONE YOU'LL LET HIM FLY AWAY AGAIN.

In that moment, as the beast approached from above, Albina Popovich called to mind the words of her wise mother, to take Mara Paranov with her so that she may never face her fears alone.
HOLY MOTHER OF GOD, LET THIS PASSING STORM STAY FOR A MOMENT. STAY AND TWIST AND PITCH AND SEND TUGARIN TO THE GROUND!
SEND US THE LIFE-GIVING RAIN, THAT IT MIGHT WET TUGARIN'S WINGS, THAT WE MIGHT MEET HIM FOOT AGAINST FOOT!

The sound of Tugarin's wings was like the wind howling, like thunderclaps above, like branches snapping in the gale.
But Albina's prayers were answered, and the thunder struck the first blow against the beast.
And so they met.

TUGARIN, YOU GLUTINOUS COW! YOU WISH TO EAT MY HORSE TOO?!
WE THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR STEEL KNIFE!
WITH IT WE WILL CUT OPEN YOUR BREAST AND SEE YOUR FIERY HEART!

Albina's companion had wounded their enemy, and she moved to finish the task.
Tugarin was ruthless and desperate...
But Albina brandished the gift he'd lost to her...
And kept her promise.

When the great storm had passed, so too had Tugarin.

Albina, the warrior born of wet and noise, and Mara, the bogatyr's servant, sat there together for a moment.

And the next moment they found their feet again.

THIS STORM WILL SOON PASS, AND ANOTHER WILL TAKE ITS PLACE. SO IT WILL GO FOR A LONG WHILE INDEED.

BUT LIKE ALBINA AND HER COMPANION, WHAT MATTERS IS THAT WE CAN FACE THE STORM TOGETHER.
THE END

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